

THE U-2 AFFAIR.

By David Wise and

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Reviewed by

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THIS is first of all an absorbing narrative of an adventure in espionage that ended in disaster. Hitherto shrouded in the childish trappings of official secrecy and the naive "cover" of the Central Intelligence Agency, the authors reveal much more than has been told thus far.

But engrossing as the story is, related with sobriety and restraint, it is more than that. In the words of Winston Churchill, those who cannot learn from history are condemned to live it over again. That harsh dictum applies with special force to the episode of the U-2. If there is any hope of learning the lesson of this bumble and its tragic consequences it lies in the book that these two able Washington correspondents have written, since everything possible has been done by both the previous and the present administration to cloud its meaning.

Above all, the meaning, presently in carefully understated conclusions, is that a venture in espionage so freighted with perils as that of the U-2 flights is far too important to entrust to overcautious technicians. Behind a screen of total secrecy these technicians are seen to have taken a fateful decision having a far-reaching effect on the course of American foreign policy and disturbing the uneasy balance between war and peace. In theory President Eisenhower knew

that the flights were continuing as the summit conference set for early May was about to be held. But the narrative makes abundantly plain how little was his first-hand responsibility either before or after the plane was brought down. Then in the immediate aftermath of the disaster there was the tangled way in which the question of whether the U-2 flights would or would not continue was handled. The net result was a maximum of confusion and uncertainty which further damaged the United States position before the world. The authors' damning conclusion is:

"There is no substantiated evidence of any sort of conspiracy to scuttle the summit. But it is clear that many important persons in the intelligence field were more concerned with the U-2 as a valuable instrument of espionage than with its possible effect on the summit. In other words, they were worried not so much that the U-2 might endanger the summit as that the summit might endanger the U-2. By May of 1960, intelligence had come to dominate the policy of the U-2 program. Instead of serving as a basis for policy-making, intelligence-gathering had become an end in itself."

One of the dramatic aspects of the narrative is the way in which the authors convey the sense of Francis Gary Powers flying his lonely mission in the all but airless upper atmosphere, pushing the buttons and pulling the levers as he had been trained to do. It was an almost intolerable strain, both physical and mental, that he endured for the high pay that the CIA offered. He was a pawn, and, as the authors show, a rather pitiful pawn, in a fearsome game that had gone beyond the control of those who had originally sanctioned it. Flying read "The U-2 Affair," one may well ask, in what other cases the vast intelligence apparatus is operating without benefit of those who are ultimately responsible for the decisions that may well determine whether we shall live or die.